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SUBJECT: LOOKING TO U.S. EXAMPLES -- GERMANY'S MINISTER FOR
EDUCATION AND RESEARCH

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¶1. (SBU) Summary -- German Minister of Education and Research Schavan told the Ambassador she wants to make her first official trip to the U.S. at the end August and also discussed her thoughts on improving Germany's education system, including to integrate immigrant populations and trying to elicit more input from the private sector so graduates can better meet the needs of a globalized workplace. She thought experiences in the U.S. would help in her achieving these goals. The Minister requested Embassy assistance in publicizing the various exchange programs available to Germans interested in the U.S. in addition to the Fulbright Program and was pleased that the numbers of Americans coming to do scientific work and other studies in Germany have risen in recent years so that the numbers of Germans and of Americans studying in each other's country is now about equal. She is interested in boosting the sorts of energy-related research activities envisioned under the 2005 Mainz Declaration. The Minister looks forward to Germany hosting the Carnegie meetings of G-8 science ministers in December in Leipzig and appreciates the U.S. agreeing to host last fall when the need to put a new government in place after the September 18 election precluded the German government from doing so. End Summary.

¶2. (U) Ambassador paid his official courtesy call on Annette Schavan (CDU), German Minister of Education and Research, May 9. Christoph Ehrenbach, Director for European and International Cooperation; Gudrun Maass, Americas desk officer; and a Ministry translator also participated. Embassy EMIN, PAO, and translator joined the Ambassador.

Reforming German Education/Looking to the U.S. for Examples

¶3. (SBU) Schavan opened stating she looks forward to her first official trip to the United States as Minister, something she now plans for late August. Throughout the conversation, the Minister suggested she thought there is a great deal in the U.S. system that could help Germany revamp its education system to enable its citizens to meet 21st century challenges. Schavan noted she again and again sees young Germans coming back from exchange programs in the U.S. enthused, having found the American culture of learning attractive. She would like such a dynamic system in Germany.

¶4. (SBU) Specific steps the Minister listed included improving early childhood education for children ages 3 - 6 in Germany; Germans traditionally started schooling at age 7. She also wants more attention on education for children of immigrant families and again sees this as an area where the U.S. experiences could help Germans develop the desired reforms. Reacting to the Ambassador's remarks, she agreed the German system too cannot concentrate primarily on providing for those going to university, but needs to equip all Germans to be able to keep learning after leaving school. It is no longer enough to let a student leave school at age 16 and think they can hold and keep a job. She also said

while Germans have traditionally looked on education as a state responsibility, this notion has to change and the public/community needs to feel greater responsibility. Schavan noted she would like each school in Germany to have a school board, similar, she said, to the practice in Switzerland.

15. (SBU) Agreeing with the Ambassador on the importance of the private sector playing a role in education to ensure those coming out of the school system are able to compete in the global markets and open to further learning, Minister Schavan said Germany traditionally had a good partnership with the private sector in developing/executing "vocational" education, including in engineering. The challenge, she continued is expanding this sort of partnership to the whole of the education system. Schavan also noted the Federal ministry's task should be setting standards which are then applied at the state (Land) levels. This point is a part of the on-going discussions in Germany on reforms to its Federal system.

Exchanges

16. (U) The Minister said she would like to see exchanges between vocational education programs) and she included scientific and engineering studies/work in this category -- in the U.S. and Germany. Her staff noted, however, that while they had successes finding academic programs, they had not been able to find counterpart companies. The Ministry staff also noted some frustration reaching below the U.S. Federal level in establishing contacts with educational institutions in the U.S. One success the Ministry staff did point to was between Koblenz and Austin.

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17. (U) The Minister also noted strong interest in expanding overall exchanges between the U.S. and Germany. The von Humboldt Foundation and DAAD (German Academic Exchange Service) programs have "a great network for exchanges of young scientists," but it is important, she continued, to expand that network. The PAO pointed to the significant activity taking place under the Fulbright Program and EMIN noted the tremendous volume of scientific exchanges taking place between NASA, EPA, the national research labs, and other USG institutions as well as the even greater volume among academic and other institutions. Maass agreed those exchanges between the U.S. and Germany number in the thousands annually, but noted while in recent years, the numbers of Germans and Americans doing research in each others, country have moved back into balance after a period where significantly more Germans were doing research in the U.S., according to Ministry studies, than Americans doing research in Germany. The Minister asked if the Embassy could post information on the various exchange programs available, including for Americans in Germany, on its website and the PAO agreed to look into doing so.

Research

18. The Ministry staff noted Germany wants to increase its ratio of research outlays to GDP from the current 2.5% to 3%. Among the areas where Germany wants to strengthen its R&D activities is in biotechnology. The Ambassador noted the German government is undercutting itself in achieving this goal through its restrictive policies on pharmaceutical pricing. He also pointed to the 2005 Mainz Declaration between the President and then Chancellor Schroeder and noted the need to re-invigorate the contacts on energy technologies called for under the Declaration. Intensifying contacts under the Mainz Declaration could help both countries improve their energy security situation and cut emissions. The Minister agreed now is a good time to look at such cooperation, for the reasons the Ambassador cited as well as due to the discussion in Germany following the Chancellor's March Energy Summit, and thought it should be possible to

look at some programs in the run-up to the President's July visit to Germany.

Comment

19. (SBU) Minister Schavan is considered to be conservative and close to Chancellor Merkel. During the conversation on research, she cited the debate over moving away from the old Schroeder government's decision to phase out nuclear power and said it is important to encourage young Germans to do research into nuclear power so the country does not "say good-bye to the technology forever." She pointed to Environment Minister Gabriel (SPD), however, as the key opponent to dropping the plans for a phase-out. Although she understands English and interjected comments in the language into the conversation, including at one point to help the Ministry translator, she spoke in German through most of the meeting.

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